



News Conference to Announce Corrections Reforms in Special Session
Wednesday, October 1, 2003
Governor's Office
Phoenix, Arizona

In my news conference yesterday I mentioned that in my call for a special session I have included the topic of funding for the Department of Corrections. We have challenges within our state prison system that we are prepared to tackle, beginning with the October 20 special session.

Arizona's prisons, which have been overcrowded for some time, are rapidly approaching maximum capacity and we must address this problem before it becomes a crisis.

Currently, Arizona's prisons are housing more than 31,000 prisoners in structures that were designed to hold fewer than 27,000 – and the population continues to grow, by more than 160 per month this year.

This population increase is far above the amount estimated by the Joint Legislative Budget Committee when it crafted the Corrections budget for this year. As a result, prison overpopulation has become acute, as inmates are sleeping in prison day rooms, libraries and other spaces not designed as secure cells.

If we do not take action to manage this overcrowding in this special session, the bed shortage will grow to nearly 5,500 by the end of this fiscal year. This presents an unacceptable security risk.

Before talking about the solutions I will propose to the Legislature, I want to make it clear that I do not support changing sentencing guidelines. As a former prosecutor, I believe in our truth-in-sentencing laws and do not support adjustments to them. If you do the crime, you still must do the time, regardless of how crowded our prisons are.

To ensure that our prisons continue to safely house their inmates, I will be requesting an additional appropriation of \$26 point 4 million for the Department of Corrections, \$9 million of which would come from the Corrections Fund and \$17 point 4 million of which would come from the General Fund.

- \$2 million would be used to quickly open 400 new low-security, Level 1 beds at Perryville.
- \$2.5 million would be used to continue the lease of 88 county-operated beds at Coconino County Jail and 50 new beds at the Navajo County Jail. This is a win-win arrangement for the state and two cash-strapped counties. I want to thank Navajo County Sheriff Gary Butler and Coconino County Sheriff Joe Richards for joining me today. You have been true partners in public safety for the people of Arizona.



- \$13 point 8 million would be spent to lease or obtain 1,600 short-term beds, to quickly help ease overcrowding until new construction in our capital budget is completed.
- \$5 million for correctional officer hiring and retention efforts,
- And \$3 point 1 million for state retirement contributions and health care premiums, which is a technical correction to the appropriation made by the Legislature in June.

I look forward to working with the Legislature on this issue, and in particular I appreciate the work that Representative Konopnicki has put into this already.

Beyond its immediate needs, the Corrections system is overdue for major structural reform. For years, prison management in Arizona has involved simply finding more housing for an ever-increasing number of inmates.

I chose Dora Schriro to head the Department of Corrections because of her innovative approach to managing corrections systems, and I gave her the task of overhauling the Arizona prison system.

Since her arrival in July, she has visited every state prison in the state and conducted a top-to-bottom review of their operations. As a result, she has provided me with several excellent recommendations for managing Arizona's Prison System, which I now want her to implement.

Part of Dora's evaluation involved examining who makes up our prison population. She found that 44 point 9 percent prison growth is not from new offenders, but from felons who have violated probation or parole. Fully 66 percent of women prisoners admitted last year came because of technical probation or parole violations.

Clearly, by reducing people's propensity for violating probation or parole we will drastically reduce the state prison population. We can accomplish this with legislation that will give judges the option to sentence probation and parole violators to "shock incarceration," which involves shorter but far more intensive prison stays.

By providing judges with this additional sentencing option, we can reduce our prison population enough to save nearly \$300 million over the next five years.

I have instructed Director Schriro to work with legislators, county sheriffs and county attorneys to explore how best to adopt the shock incarceration model for Arizona.

I am particularly anxious to see Director Schriro's "parallel universe" model implemented, wherein prisoners conduct themselves much the same as they would in the outside world. They will all work, where applicable they will contribute to the restitution of their victims, they will all participate in basic educational and vocational training, and



those who need it will participate in treatment programs for substance abuse and sex offenses.

In Missouri, Director Schriro proved that the parallel universe model will drastically reduce recidivism rates because inmates live in routines that reflect life outside of prison, thus reducing the shock of reentry into free society when they have served their time.

I look forward to this model being implemented in Arizona, and not just because it will save millions of tax dollars. It will help reduce crime, which means reducing the number of future crime victims.

Even with these reforms, it is clear that in the long term we will need more permanent prison beds than we now have.

I have accepted Director Schriro's five-year plan, which will include beginning construction this year on 9,134 additional beds at a total cost of \$470 million, which would be financed over 15 years.

I will ask the Legislature in the upcoming special session for authority to proceed with construction.

One planned project is a partnership with Pinal County for a new joint county jail and state prison facility. This is another win-win arrangement between the state and a county. I want to thank Pinal Sheriff Roger Vanderpool for joining me here today.

As we construct new prisons, we must be smarter about how we build. Over five years we can save tens of millions of dollars in land acquisition and construction costs by expanding existing facilities and regrouping inmates, rather than build new, privatized prisons.

For instance, the state currently has proposals from private vendors to establish in Pinal County the largest private female prison in the nation.

Director Schriro has concluded, and I agree, that we can save a significant amount of money, at least \$15 million, by not pursuing this privatization proposal. Instead, we intend to pursue expansion of the Perryville and Tucson prisons.

This is the smarter thinking that will ensure more efficiently run prisons that over time will reduce costs to the taxpayer, reduce the number of inmates returning to prison after release, and ultimately reduce the number of crime victims.

I am happy to answer questions.